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ABSTRACT

The personal problems and psychological needs of college students may vary according to their living arrangements. To compare the types and number of problems resident and commuter students bring to a university counseling center, the intake data of 345 students (152 dormitory residents, 193 commuters; 177 women, 168 men) seeking individual counseling during the 1981-82 academic year were analyzed. Data were categorized according to sex, type and number of problems, resident status, and class. An analysis of the results showed that dormitory residents sought help for personal problems more often than expected, and commuters sought help for more than one problem more often than expected. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the freshmen sought counseling, while only 13% of the juniors and 10% of the seniors sought counseling. Freshmen sought more test feedback, and juniors sought more personal counseling. Although women comprised 40% of the student body, 51% of the counselees were female. Students with personal problems were seen for more sessions than were any other students. Juniors were seen for the largest number of sessions followed by seniors, sophomores, and freshmen. Finally, junior and sophomore dormitory residents were seen for more sessions than were commuters, and senior commuters were seen for more sessions than senior dormitory residents. (BL)

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Problems Bringing Commuters, Dormitory Residents, and Students from Different Classes to Counseling

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Abstract

Dormitory residents were found to seek help for personal concerns more often than expected while commuters were found to seek help for more than one problem more often than expected.

Problems Bringing Commuters, Dormitory Residents, and Students from Different Classes to Counseling

The purpose of this study was to compare the types of problems resident and commuter students seek help for at a university counseling center. Dormitory living is generally felt to provide students with a better opportunity for personal growth and development than commuting (Chickering, 1969), but this growth is accompanied by the stresses caused by exposure to new ideas and environments (Katz, 1975). On the other hand, commuter students have been shown to be less involved with college life and to have more problems with finances, academics, family, and peers than resident students (Chickering, 1974). It was felt that the differences between residents and commuters might lead them to seek counseling for different reasons.

It was also felt that the problems which bring students to counseling would differ according to year in school. Presumably students in the early stages of college would seek more career and educational counseling to get them "off on the right foot" than would upperclassmen. Freshmen at the present university are given a battery of vocational-educational tests which includes a personal problem check list. It was expected that they would come for feedback on these tests more frequently than would students from other classes. Upperclassmen, who have generally settled into coursework and college living, would presumably seek less counseling than underclassmen.

Method

Subjects were 345 students (177 women and 168 men) who came to the counseling center for individual counseling during the 1981-82 academic year. The sample included 186 freshmen, 81 sophomores, 44 juniors, and 34 seniors.

There were 152 dormitory residents and 193 commuters in the sample.

Intake cards for all students seeking individual counseling were categorized according to sex (female, male), type of problem (educational, career, personal, freshman test feedback, other, more than one problem indicated), resident status (dormitory student, commuter), and class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Students who came to the center for counseling in groups or workshops were not included in the sample nor were students from the School of General Studies as they could not be categorized into classes. Graduate students, alumni, nonstudents, and students not providing information on intake cards were also excluded. The sample thus represented approximately 70% of the total number of people seen for individual counseling during 1981-82.

Results

Resident and commuter students sought individual counseling in proportion to their representation in the student body. Residents composed 40% of the student body and sought 44% of the counseling. Commuters composed 60% of the student body and sought 56% of the counseling. These differences were not significant.

There was a significant chi square between resident status and type of problem ((5) = 35.59, $p<.0001$). Table 1 presents observed and expected values for resident and commuter students for each problem category. Dormitory residents came to the counseling center for personal counseling more often than expected while commuters came for personal counseling less often than expected. Commuter students sought counseling for more than one problem more often than expected while resident students sought help for more than one problem less often than expected. These four findings accounted for 76% of the total chi square.

Freshmen sought individual counseling proportionately more often than expected by their representation in the student body (z = 10.51, $p<.001$). Juniors (z = -6.22, $p<.001$) and seniors (z = -8.62, $p<.001$) sought counseling less often than expected by their representation in the student body. Each class comprised approximately 25% of the college population, but 54% of the students who sought counseling were freshmen while only 13% of the counselees were juniors and 10% were seniors. Sophomores came to counseling in numbers expected by their representation in the student body.

There was a significant chi square between class and type of problem ((15) = 138.21, $p<.0001$). Table 2 presents observed and expected values for students from each class in each problem category. More freshmen than expected but fewer sophomores and juniors than expected sought freshmen test feedback. Fewer freshmen than expected but more juniors than expected sought personal counseling. Freshmen sought career counseling less often than expected and seniors sought counseling for other concerns more often than expected. These seven findings accounted for 67% of the total chi square.

Women sought individual counseling more often than expected by their numbers in the student body (z = 3.94, $p<.001$). Women comprised 40% of the student body and 51% of the counselees.

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for numbers of counseling sessions according to problem, class, and class x residence. An analysis of variance demonstrated a significant Problem effect (F (5, 321) = 16.50, $p<.0001$). Students with personal problems were seen for more sessions than were students who had any of the other listed concerns.

There was a significant main effect for Class (F (3, 329) = $p<.0001$). Juniors were seen for the largest number of sessions followed by seniors, sophomores, and freshmen. There was a significant Class X Residence

interaction (F (3, 329) = $p<.02$). Junior and sophomore dormitory residents were seen for more sessions than junior and sophomore commuters while senior commuters were seen for more sessions than senior dormitory residents.

Discussion

In general, the findings supported previous research and hypotheses. Chickering's (1974) finding that commuting students had more problems in a number of areas than resident students is supported by the finding that commuting students came to counseling for more than one problem more often than expected while residents were underrepresented in this category. Commuters at the present university are generally not as financially well off as residents and must work to put themselves through college. Work often interferes with academics and social life. Financial pressures lead to concerns regarding careers, and the stresses of living at home are frequently felt. Also because they have to travel to receive counseling, commuters may be more apt than dormitory residents to wait until problems pile up before seeking assistance.

On the other hand, dormitory residents did not come for counseling for more than one problem as often as expected but did come exclusively for personal counseling more often than expected. The reverse was true of commuters. Students who live in dormitories have been found to experience more personal growth than commuters (Chickering, 1969, 1974), but growth is often a stressful experience and may increase the likelihood that a student will seek personal counseling.

Freshmen made more use of the counseling center than expected by their numbers in the student body. The freshman testing program brings a number of freshmen to the center for feedback. The numbers of freshmen requesting personal and career counseling were less than expected because test feedback

covers career, educational, and personal concerns. As hypothesized, fewer upperclassmen than expected came for counseling, and when they did seek help, it was generally for personal concerns. Juniors in particular sought more personal counseling than expected indicating that the junior year must be a time of particular stress. Seniors came for other types of counseling more often than expected. These seniors generally were residence hall assistants who came for consultations.

Not surprisingly, students who came for personal counseling were seen for more sessions than students who came for other types of counseling. Juniors and seniors were seen for more sessions than students from other classes because they sought more personal counseling than other students. Sophomore and junior dormitory residents were seen for more sessions than their commuting counterparts. This was probably due to the fact that dormitory students came for personal counseling more frequently than commuters. However, senior dormitory students had fewer sessions than senior commuters. The reason for this is not entirely clear. Often seniors find close, off-campus housing during their final year in college which may account for their being more like dormitory residents with respect to number of counseling sessions than commuters.

Women came for counseling more often than expected. College women have been found to admit having more problems than college men (Palladino & Tryon, 1978). This may be because they have more problems or because they are simply more open about their problems than are college men.

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Table 1

Observed and Expected Values for Resident and Commuter Students for Each Problem Category

Problem	Residents		Commuters	
	Observed	(Expected)	Observed	(Expected)
Educational	7	(7)	8	(8)
Career	9	(13)	21	(17)
Personal	49	(32)	24	(41)
Freshman Test Feedback	45	(46)	59	(58)
Other Concerns	12	(7)	4	(9)
More Than One Problem	30	(47)	77	(60)

Table 2

Observed and Expected Values for Students from Each Class in Each Problem Category

Problem	Class							
	Freshman		Sophomore		Junior		Senior	
	O	(E)*	O	(E)	O	(E)	O	(E)
Educational	5	(8)	6	(4)	1	(2)	3	(1)
Career	5	(16)	12	(7)	7	(4)	6	(3)
Personal	18	(39)	22	(17)	22	(9)	11	(7)
Freshman Test Feedback	90	(56)	10	(24)	1	(13)	3	(10)
Other Concerns	2	(9)	4	(4)	2	(2)	8	(2)
More Than One Problem	66	(58)	27	(25)	11	(14)	3	(11)

*O = Observed, (E) = Expected

Table 3

Counseling Sessions According to Problem, Class, and Class X Residence

	Sessions	
Problem	Mean	Standard Deviation
Educational	1.47	2.14
Career	1.80	3.73
Personal	8.15	8.83
Freshmen Tests	1.36	2.63
Other	2.50	3.20
More Than One Problem	2.55	4.62
Class		
Freshman	2.31	4.14
Sophomore	3.20	5.36
Junior	6.56	8.28
Senior	4.38	7.36
Class X Residence		
Freshman - Dorm	2.22	3.39
Freshman - Commute	2.36	4.44
Sophomore - Dorm	4.29	6.73
Sophomore - Commute	2.23	3.65
Junior - Dorm	9.00	9.51
Junior - Commute	4.50	6.02
Senior - Dorm	2.76	4.03
Senior - Commute	6.00	9.45